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SUBJECT: PM GILANI FIRES NSA DURRANI

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

11. (C) Summary. On January 8, Ambassador Mahmood Durrani confirmed to Ambassador that he had been fired by PM Gilani late on January 7. The press reported that Gilani fired Durrani because he confirmed to the press that Mumbai attacker Mohammed (Ajmal) Kasab was indeed a Pakistani citizen without consulting with the PM. Durrani said he had written authority and had conferred with ISI DG Pasha before notifying the media. His dismissal has more to do with internal GOP dynamics than about Pakistani views on India or the Mumbai investigation. As is increasingly the case, PM Gilani was out of the loop and reacted angrily that he had not been consulted before the media announcement. Durrani told Ambassador that President Zardari had called him to apologize; both Interior Minister Malik and Ambassador to the U.S. Haqqani confirmed to Ambassador that Zardari did not know Gilani was going to take this action. Durrani told Ambassador that Zardari promised that he would place Durrani in another position, but that he (Durrani) would decline if a new position were to be proffered. Zardari told Ambassador that he would try to find another high-level position for Durrani, but he had some sympathy for Gilani, who had heard about Durrani's statements on the news and was blindsided. End Summary.

12. (C) On January 7, Prime Minister Gilani summarily fired National Security Advisor Ambassador Mahmood Durrani. According to press reports, he was fired because he confirmed to the press that Mohammed (Ajmal) Kasab, the lone surviving member of the Mumbai attackers, was a Pakistani citizen. Ambassador called Durrani January 8 to confirm the story. Durrani said he had consulted with ISI Director General Pasha and gotten his concurrence about announcing that Kasab was Pakistani. Pasha had been very specific that the government wanted to disseminate that information. Durrani said he was one of four people authorized, in writing, to make such statements on behalf of the government. (This is contradicted by others in government.)

13. (C) Despite Durrani's assertion, the GOP did not coordinate release of the information. Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir first denied the report, then confirmed it. Separately, Information Minister Sherry Rehman confirmed it. When Gilani heard about these statements, said Durrani, he was in Lahore and out of the loop, and decided to fire Durrani for not consulting with him. (According to visiting Ambassador Haqqani, a Durrani ally, Gilani was a recipient of the memo authorizing Durrani to confirm Kasab's nationality, but Gilani may not have seen it.)

¶4. (C) Durrani said President Zardari called him when he returned from Kabul and apologized three times. "Did President Zardari know?" Ambassador asked. Durrani responded, "All I can say is that he apologized three times." Zardari suggested he would offer Durrani another position, but Durrani told Ambassador he was not going to accept. He said that he was still dedicated to good relations with India, "his life,s work," and would continue to work with "your great country" on these issues as a private citizen.

¶5. (C) In a meeting January 8 with Ambassador, Interior Minister Rehman Malik confirmed Zardari did not know that Gilani had fired Durrani. He said Durrani had never managed to develop good chemistry with the PM. As you know, he said "the PM is not very smart." The PM had been smarting for weeks that he was out of the loop and not kept informed by his ministers on a range of issues. Speaking about his own relations with Gilani, Malik said that he had an air-clearing session with Gilani a few days ago and arranged to have better cell phone connections with him. Malik said he reminded the PM that he had tried to get in touch with him for a full day in the PM's home town of Multan recently about one of his operations but could not find him.

¶6. (C) Malik said the GOP did have a plan to roll out the information about Kasab gradually and find his associates. They were afraid that his associates would disappear. In that respect, he thought that Durrani had overreached, and there had certainly been confusion among Pasha, Durrani, and Salman Bashir as to what should be disseminated. That said, he believed that the government now looked ridiculous. They

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looked as if they were trying to conceal the truth. However, if Durrani were reinstated, it would look as if there was internal tension in the government. He said that the government looked bad both domestically and to the international community. Malik said he was going to try to help Durrani and had already talked to him twice on the phone.

¶7. (C) In a meeting with Ambassador and DCM January 8, Ambassador to the U.S. Haqqani confirmed that Zardari did not know about this and that it was largely a result of irritation by the PM. He said that the PM had someone call GEO news and release the story, which violated government procedures on hiring/firing decisions.

¶8. (C) When Ambassador called on Zardari evening of January 8 to discuss an upcoming codel, both the PM and Zardari were present. Zardari went out of his way to reiterate his commitment to the Prime Minister and their interest in working together. When the PM departed for another meeting, Ambassador asked what had happened to Durrani. Zardari said that he thought that Durrani had probably overreached, that he had a better plan for rolling out the information on Mumbai, but the real issue was that the PM had heard about Durrani,s announcement, which he said was first given to the Indian media, from TV. The PM was then deluged with media inquiries to which he could not respond. Zardari said it was not good for Pakistan to let the PM be embarrassed like that; at least Durrani should have discussed the issue with him. He said he would find another important position for Durrani if Durrani would accept it, but he was also struggling with Durrani's replacement, since he wanted the position filled quickly.

¶9. (C) Comment: Malik's newfound sympathy for his rival Durrani probably reflects concern that the PM could strike again. In recent weeks, Gilani has summarily fired his chief of staff and press secretary, both of whom were chosen by Zardari. The press has been reporting rumors of a split between Zardari and Gilani because Zardari has usurped power from the prime ministry. The opposition Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party has been quick to compare Zardari's style to that of former President Musharraf, who also sidelined the

Prime Minister. In response, Zardari has taken some steps to distance himself, including abolishing the Musharraf-era National Security Council and indicating he may fulfill a campaign promise to abolish parts of the 17th Amendment (which transferred from the PM to the President the power to dissolve the National Assembly and appoint the service chiefs).

¶10. (C) There have been suggestions that Zardari would replace Gilani with FM Qureshi, but Zardari denied this rumor to Ambassador and suggested it was being spread by Qureshi himself. The GOP is considering combining Codel Biden's meetings with the President and the PM to dispel further rumors of a split. However, if Gilani continues to excel at embarrassing gaffes, his future as PM may be limited.

¶11. (C) Durrani was a good friend to the U.S., a voice of reason on foreign policy, and an advocate of improved Indo-Pak ties. We will miss him, and the mode of his departure is another reminder that the GOP has yet to coordinate its national security decision-making and continues to fumble on adopting a coherent and effective strategy to communicate information to the public.
PATTERSON